CREATIVE ENCOUNTERS

Creativity at Work:

Ethics and the fashion industry in West Europe

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Abstract

The question of ethics is about determining concepts of right and wrong human action. There are a number of ethical controversies in relation to the industries that dress the visible self, especially clothing, shoes, accessories and skincare industries. The most important are, firstly, representations of idealized gender and body images, secondly, fakes and counterfeits of branded goods, thirdly, working conditions, fourthly, environmental impact and sustainability, and fifthly, animal rights. In a strict philosophical sense, these issues cannot be said to be purely moral because they overlap with political, social, legal, economic and environmental concerns. But they are problems that have been cast in terms of right and wrong behaviour from the point of view of West European industries and consumers. Because both consumption and production of dress are highly globalized these debates in West Europe are not qualitatively different from those of other highly developed regions. Many ethical problems, campaigns and monitoring issues are distinctly transnational because both consumer markets and production systems are highly globalized. It is a paradox that while many consumers have a positive involvement with clothing in terms of emotional attachment and identification, they also tend to have a distinctively negative image of the industry behind. In fact, there is a widespread cynicism about the fashion industry.

Keywords

Ethics, Environment, Sustainability, Animal rights, Fashion models, Fakes

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Ethics and the fashion industry in West Europe

The question of ethics is about determining concepts of right and wrong human action. There are a number of ethical controversies in relation to the industries that dress the visible self, especially clothing, shoes, accessories and skincare industries. The most important are, firstly, representations of idealized gender and body images, secondly, fakes and counterfeits of branded goods, thirdly, working conditions, fourthly, environmental impact and sustainability, and fifthly, animal rights. In a strict philosophical sense, these issues cannot be said to be purely moral because they overlap with political, social, legal, economic and environmental concerns. But they are problems that have been cast in terms of right and wrong behaviour from the point of view of West European industries and consumers. Because both consumption and production of dress are highly globalized these debates in West Europe are not qualitatively different from those of other highly developed regions. Many ethical problems, campaigns and monitoring issues are distinctly transnational because both consumer markets and production systems are highly globalized. It is a paradox that while many consumers have a positive involvement with clothing in terms of emotional attachment and identification, they also tend to have a distinctively negative image of the industry behind. In fact, there is a widespread cynicism about the fashion industry.

In the 1990s, many companies became aware that the conditions of their suppliers ought to be included in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy. In Europe, CSR is usually defined as social, and sometimes also environmental, initiatives, which go beyond what is required by law. This is in contrast to many developing countries, where legal compliance is the goal of corporate responsibility. European companies have not only gone into this area out of a purely altruism, but also because the various campaigns and consumer boycotts targeted sweatshop conditions in both the increasingly deregulated economies at home and in developing countries.

However, in the beginning of the 21st century the West European public took a distinct interest in the ethics of the fashion industry. In contrast to previous defensive company policies, the more recent development is that companies, such as Edun, People Tree and Noir, make ethical fashion their brand concept, while large retailers, such as H&M, Topshop and Marks and Spencer have added fair-trade and organic (or partially organic) collections to their offerings. Several smaller companies have claimed that 'we want to be the brand that makes corporate social responsibility sexy' and fashion magazine Vanity Fair has started publishing a Green Issue each year. Even museum exhibitions on ethical problems in the fashion industry have captured a large audience as was the case with the Gothenburg's Museum of World Culture 2007-8 'Fair Fashion?' exhibition which presented a critical view of cotton

production, or the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History's 2007 exhibition 'Nothing disappears' on textile waste and recycling.

The increasing awareness of the ethical issues of the fashion business is set against a bleak backdrop. There has been a long-term drop in clothing prices, which is reflected in the fact that, in France, the share of a family household budget allocated to dress has gone from around 10 per cent in 1970 to around 5 per cent in 2000. Because garment manufacturing continues to be dependent on individually-operated sewing machines, fashion companies are still in a situation where the main method of minimizing out-of-factory prices is to put pressure on working conditions and wages. The pressure to control prices is an overall constraint in clothing manufacturing. But in the first decade of the 21st century clothing prices have gone down even further with the rapid expansion of low value retailers such as super markets and chain stores, adding the pressure on suppliers and workers in the low end of the market. In all price segments, material and labor costs make up 5-7 per cent of the retail price.

The decrease in prices has been accompanied by an increase in consumption volume. In 2007, the average Swedish consumer bought 24 kilos of textile materials, an increase of 9 kilos per year since 1994. Not surprisingly, this rise in consumption has led to increasing problems in recycling and waste processing. In Sweden, around 30.000 metric tons of clothing are donated to charities each year, while the estimated textile waste per person per year is 5-10 kilos.

The role of NGOs and the absence of government regulation

Controversies over the ethics of the fashion industry often appear as a combat between corporate power and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The long-running anti-sweatshop campaign against Nike, which took off in 1996, has been presented as a standoff between highly paid CEO Phil Knight and Nike's sponsored celebrities, such as Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods, on the one hand, and poorly paid factory workers in Indonesia and Vietnam on the other. In such dramas, corporations tend to have little public legitimacy whereas NGOs are often presented as modern day Robin Hoods. Strictly speaking, NGOs, which include consumer groups, environmental groups, animal protection groups, the women's movement, youth organisations, solidarity groups, churches and trade unions, are not publicly accountable because they are not democratically elected. There are many NGOs that have a long-standing reputation for serious work, for example Oxfam or Clean Clothes Campaign, while others, including Greenpeace and PETA, have been criticized for compromising ethics in order to maximize income and media exposure.

The main reason why ethical issues are come to the attention of the public through combats between companies and NGOs is that governments play a

relatively insignificant role. Without an agreement of responsibility handling ethical dilemmas can end up in finger-pointing, and they potentially can go out of control. Under the present conditions of globalization, the fear that special regulative measures can damage national competitiveness is quoted as the reason for reluctance to regulate not only labour conditions and environmental protection, but also working conditions for fashion models. West European governments have been most active in regulation of advertising, intellectual property, and animal welfare, whereas regulation of working conditions and environmental impact is considered to be the responsibility of the countries where the manufacturing industries are located. But as these governments offer tax breaks, guarantee of low wages and no liability for environmental destruction in order to attract and hold on to foreign investments, they tend to lenient when it comes to protection of labour and natural resources.

Company and industry self regulation

The most important kind of industrial regulation takes place at company level. A company's policy towards suppliers is formalized in a code of conduct which is a unilateral set of rules outlining the responsibilities of or proper practices for an organization. A code of conduct typically also stipulates a number of requirements that suppliers must fulfill, such as freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, limitation of overtime, workplace health and safety, prohibition of child labour and forced labour, and protection of the environment.

Although formalized in codes of conduct and CSR policies, the problem of company self regulation is that it is not accountable to the public. To counter this criticism, some companies work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Max Havelaar, Control Union, or the International Labour Organization (ILO) to define and monitor their code of conduct. There are a number of international standards and certificates developed by the International Organization for Standarization (ISO), International Labour Organization (ILO), Control Union, Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), Max Havelaar and Fairtrade among others. Some of these standards guarantee product qualities (of for example organically grown cotton or durable chemical surface treatment) whereas others guarantee production processes (for example, the absence of child labour or payment of living wages as opposed to minimum wages). But because certification processes themselves are quite costly and complicated, standards are not a neutral measurement of product quality. They are, for example, beyond the reach of small suppliers. A study by economic geographers Peter Gibbon and Stefano Ponte even found that standards tend to increase the power of West European buyers over developing-country suppliers.

Companies with an ethical agenda

It should be noted that there are companies that incorporate a genuine dedication to playing a critical role in society. The most famous crossover between business and activism is skincare company The Body Shop, founded in 1976 by Anita Roddick. The Body Shop has been involved in a number of environmental, animal, social and human rights issues, and the company's commitment to political activism seems to have continued after it was bought by the L'Oréal Group in 2006. Another example is outdoor wear company Patagonia, founded by Yvon Chouinard in 1970, which has been closely associated with environmental activism and which has a strong commitment to using organic cotton and recycled polyester. While these examples have been fuelled the company founders' personal values, more recent developments indicate that the crossover between business and activism is no longer limited to privately-owned companies. For example, since 2005 skincare company Dove, owned by Anglo-Dutch Unilever, has based its advertising on so-called 'real women' that do not conform to the standards of age, size, skin colour and look of professional models. These and many other company initiatives have been criticised as hypocrisy on the basis of the assumption that companies are or should be profit-maximizing machines, and that therefore concern for the public good will always be hypocritical. While this assumption is actually liberalist is can be found among critical voices. However, those reports that endorse a deeper corporate engagement with environmental and social issues, such as WWF-UKs reports 'Let them eat cake' (2006) and 'Deeper Luxury' (2007) warn that a superficial marketing of green values without substantial action can backlash as consumers and NGOs inspect the action behind the brand.

The power of the media

The unprecedented geographical, social and cultural distance between producers and consumers, which is an effect of outsouring, complicates ethical judgements. The separation of producers from consumers is not in itself new. But there is a big difference between the 19th century fashion salon in which the threshold to its upstairs workshop was crossed regularly when seamstresses came down to assist customers in fittings, or the post-war factories with their large unionized labour forces that had a say in the welfare state, and the condition in the beginning of the 21st century when apparel factories are dispersed in remote areas. Today, few people in West Europe are familiar with factory life. Future generations of fashion designers are educated without first-hand experience of manufacturing industries.

Under such conditions of globalization, the media play an essential role of making ethical problems in the fashion industry visible to the public. The issues that reach the consumers are therefore selected and filtered to get airtime; and they are packaged to produce maximum effect, typically by presenting a close-

up of the selected issue and by personalizing a conflict sp that it does not appear complex or abstract. Many of these images are designed to bring out emotional reactions, whether they present tired Chinese factory girls going to sleep by their sewing machines, poor Indian cotton farmers spraying their fields with poisonous pesticides, or cats and dogs being skinned alive in a dusty market street in China. Because of the cultural distance between producers and consumers there are two major uncertainties in evaluating such images. Firstly, are the conditions presented exploitative in the context of a developing economy, as critics claim, or do they contribute to the generation of welfare under poor conditions, as some companies and liberalist scholars claim? Secondly, do the images show ordinary reality, or are they staged for the camera to look particularly bad? These questions must be answered in relation to each ethical issue and each campaign.

Non-governmental organizations have long been aware of the power of the media. Greenpeace founder Bob Hunter coined the term 'mindbombs' for 'simple images, delivered by the media that would "explode in people's minds" and create a new understanding of the world.' Using the media in political struggle has been revitalised by the anti-globalization movement that emerged after the demonstrations at the World Trade Organization Conference in Seattle in 1999. One way of doing that is through spoof ads that twist brand slogans and images. This has been the main strategy of the adbusters in North America and the déboulonneurs in France.

The internet plays an essential role in making information available, and because the internet is an interactive medium it is ideal for individuals who wish to know more about their favourite brand, or who considers what they should buy, if anything. NGOs monitoring the ethics of the fashion industry all run websites where they publish their reports and give up-to-date information about running campaigns. Companies publish their Codes of Conduct, their CSR policies and information about the charity programmes. A dedicated company such as Patagonia makes it possible for the consumer to follow the journey of selected items from raw material to retail outlet in the so-called 'footprint chronicle', and Fur Commission USA presents a range of articles that argue that 'fur is green' because it is renewable, durable, recyclable and resource efficient.

Celebrities

Celebrities also play a key role in creating media exposure for ethical problems. Linda and Paul McCartney, dedicated to a vegan lifestyle since the mid 1970s, have appeared for and supported animal rights groups such as Lynx and Peta. Their daughter, fashion designer Stella McCartney's presents collections without fur, leather, wool and silk. Bono is another celebrity who has been deeply involved with philanthropy since the 1980s, both in collaboration with Amnesty International and as initiator of numerous charities especially focusing on Africa, and as an intermediary between companies, NGOs and

politicians. In 2005 he founded the socially conscious organic cotton clothing company EDUN in collaboration with his wife Ali Hewson and fashion designer Rogan Gregory. Product Red is another initiative begun by Bono and Bobby Shriver to raise money for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Product Red is a brand that is licensed to a wide range of partner companies, including fashion-related companies Converse, The Gap, and Giorgio Armani. Each company creates a product with the Product Red logo and a percentage of the profits from the sale of these labelled products will go to the Global Fund. While few celebrities have been equally devoted to public causes, many others have been involved including Angelina Jolie, Leonardo diCaprio, George Clooney, Emma Thompson, Madonna, Gwyneth Paltrow, Brad Pitt and Natalie Portman.

Single issues

Information of ethical problems, whether from companies and NGOs, tends to reach consumers through single-issue campaigns. The focus on single issues has long been noted as a characteristic of consumer politics. The constraints of marketing and advertising also apply to critical campaigns: it is only possible to get through with a simple message that is repeated many times. The weakness of single-issue campaigns is that they lead to fragmented politics in which it is hard to put the pieces together to a whole picture.

In fact, different ethical concerns may clash. For example, Canadian women's studies scholar Julia Emberley has shown how anti-fur campaigns by Lynx and Peta present negative stereotypes of women with slogans such as 'It takes up to 40 dumb animals to make a fur coat. But only one to wear it.' Tag Heuer's fund-raising for the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) through a series of photographic exhibitions in which the world's top female photographers present portraits of exceptional women has been criticized for being 'glam philanthropy' in the WWF-UK report Deeper Luxury (2007). The most single issues in the beginning of the 21st century are representations of idealized gender and body images, fakes and counterfeits of branded goods, working conditions, environmental impact and sustainability, and animal rights. Because single issues do not come together in coherent arguments, they must be treated separately.

Idealized gender and body images

Feminist scholars such as Susan Bordo and Susie Orbach have argued that the idealized images of slim bodies that saturate the media in highly developed countries contribute to women's (and to a lesser extent men's) insecurity and self doubts. Indeed, a global survey of women in ten countries, conducted by Dove in 2005, found that women everywhere state that beauty ideals are too narrowly defined. Many women reported feelings of anxiety and inadequacy about their overall physical appearance, and especially their body weight and

shape. However, there is no consensus about how exactly idealized images affect those who view them. While it is widely agreed that people are not dupes who passively accept the ideals held up for them, it is not realistic to dismiss all influence whatsoever, especially as beauty and fashion are closely connected to complex social and economic changes, including the growth in visual media. In this respect, fashion and beauty industries both reflect and shape broader cultural ideals.

The typical response to the allegation that advertising presents extreme images is that fashion and beauty images are not intended to be realistic. They need to present something out of the ordinary to fuel the desire for the products they endorse. In this respect, the models and celebrities that embody these extreme ideals become front line figures in the controversy over the ethics of fashion images.

In the early 1990s, the relation between French cosmetics company Lancôme and its exclusive spokesmodel Isabella Rossellini was seen to push the limits of a narrow beauty ideal because it continued after Rossellini turned 40 and because it was unaffected by her role as a masochist and abused woman in the controversial film Blue Velvet. When the contract ended in 1996, Rossellini was 44. Another example from the positive side is skincare brand Dove that launched its campaign for real beauty in 2004 and the following year changed all its advertising to use amateur models. In 2006 Dove began to fund research, information campaigns and educational programs about women's self image through its Self-Esteem Fund.

In 2006, the connection between eating disorders and fashion models became a major concern for the European fashion industry after the deaths of two Latin American models. The Madrid Fashion Week and the Milan Fashion Week acted quickly by requiring health certificates and restricting models with a body mass index under 18 from participating in catwalk shows. In other countries, fashion week organizers opted for less restrictive solutions than measuring models' body mass index. Instead they required companies to establish a healthy backstage environment which is non-smoke, alcohol-free and drug-free and where nutritious snacks are available. Some countries have also restricted models under age 16.

The British Fashion Institute's inquiry into the condition of fashion models has uncovered how fashion brands in the attempt to establish their distinctiveness seek out 'new faces', that is younger models with less experience, and how small companies, which are typically underfinanced, squeeze models' fees and working conditions. Their recommendation is to strengthen the role of the model agencies in looking after young models and educating them on healthy lifestyles, to standardize medical certificates as a part of a model's portfolio. The report noted firstly, that many models suffer from low self-esteem, and secondly, that eating disorders, especially in very young people, affect the brain in ways that may lead to drug abuse or other abuse later in life. In fact, a number of models have expressed that working as a

(top) model is a highly stressful and competitive job, and that drug abuse is common.

Launched to coincide with Milan fashion week 2007, Italian brand Nolita presented a blatantly provocative advertising campaign, shot by photographer Oliviero Toscani, featuring anorectic women Isabelle Caro, weighing only 31 kilos. The same year, Spanish chain stores, including Zara and Mango, decided to increase the size of shop dummies to a South European size 38, and to incorporate the South European size 46 in their normal clothing range. The Spanish health minister, Elena Salgado stated that 'It is not reasonable for a modern and advanced society to establish stereotypes of beauty that are far removed from social reality'.

Although Size Zero does not exist in any European sizing system, it became a concept in the European fashion press, especially the English-language magazines, but it also appeared in the French, German, Italian and Spanish press during the 2006-7 debate over fashion models and eating disorders. Size Zero is the smallest size in the North American sizing system, corresponding to a British size 4, a North European size 34 and a South European size 36. As zero is the starting point of the numerical scale and also a number which has no value in itself, it is hardly surprising that Size Zero has come to symbolise both the perceived perfection of an extremely slim female body and the low self-esteem of women who undergo excessive diets and fitness programmes in order to achieve an unhealthy ideal. As such, Size Zero connotes both an object of desire and a symbol of depravation.

Fakes

Fakes are used as a combined term for a range of different qualities – from shoddy rip-offs to so-called 'genuine fakes' that are of such a high quality that only production experts can tell the difference. Fakes are a legal and economic issue, but they are often also presented as an ethical problem. Legally, a distinction is made between, firstly, pirated goods which are rip-offs where there is no doubt that it is a fake, secondly, imitation goods which have product semblance, but where details – typically the logo – are changed, and thirdly, counterfeits which are designed to mislead the consumer into believing that the goods that are presented are the real thing.

While imitation has always been considered to be a driving force in fashion, the preconditions for the current problems were established in the 1980s when there was a simultaneous growth in the markets for branded good and a increase in outsourcing. Typical fake products from that period were copy watches and sportswear, including shoes and bags. Sportswear company LaCoste's logo has been copied widely, and a crocodile logo has been legally adopted by more than one Asian clothing company. In the 1990s there was an explosion of fake luxury accessories, especially handbags and belts with prominent logos from European companies, such as Chanel, Louis Vuitton,

Gucci and Burburry. Making logos the distinctive feature of product design has been done in order to capitalize on the brand in markets where other qualities such as material or technical quality or craftsmanship cannot be expected to be recognized by consumers.

The ethical, cultural and economic implications of fakes are ambiguous. European fashion companies are increasingly dependent intellectual property protection as immaterial products such as brands, logos and design concepts have come to represent a much higher value than manufacturing of clothing and accessories. A protectionist stance has long been adopted by the French manufacturers union who established a museum of counterfeits in Paris in 1951. The main argument against fakes is for the protection of industries – for example in the content industries is that copying or downloading media content or software because it cheats the artist and production company out of returns that should cover and reward the investment required to make new products. A second argument is for consumer protection; since fakes are inferior products that may constitute a safety hazards. However, this argument is not as powerful for garments and accessories as it is for low-quality automobile parts or diluted medicine. Thirdly, it has been pointed out that international trade in fakes is controlled by organized crime and as such associated with illegal arms trade, drug trade, sex trade and terrorism.

However, many European consumers do not see fakes as an ethical problem, but rather as a kind of harmless fun that can be acquired on a trip to Asia. In 2006, the wife of the Danish prime minister was spotted with a fake Louis Vuitton bag on more than one occasion, including during the official visit of the American president and his wife. Although she was chastised by the press, the incidence illustrates the neutral attitude many consumers have to fakes. There is no doubt that the fakes have helped make many brands famous, especially in the manufacturing regions in Asia. In this respect, fakes, rather than threaten genuine products have served as free advertising for European and North American brands. Some scholars have even argued that fakes are a kind of cultural imperialism because they undermine local creativity.

Labor conditions

The working conditions of a predominantly female workforce in the clothing business have long been perceived as an ethical problem. Even though the haute couture houses of Worth and Paguin, which were among the largest employers in Paris in the second half of the 19th century, produced elaborate clothing for the top of society, seamstresses in these hierarchical companies did not have a share in the glamour. In fact, poor working conditions have been a shared characteristic of all the segments of the fashion industry, including low wages, long and irregular working hours, with poor lighting and no ventilation and few, if any, safety precautions. But the fashion industry's landmarks in labour history did not take place in West Europe where the industry has been

highly segmented, but in New York City where the industry served the large and relatively homogenous North American market, and hence offered better conditions for fostering solidarity among workers. In 1909 and 1910, women garment workers' union successfully organized massive strikes in New York City. But only the following year, almost 150 women workers died in the Triangle Shirt Waist Factory fire because doors were locked. This disaster started a series of reforms to improve working conditions in the garment industry.

However, because of the difficulty in handling fabrics, the clothing industry continues to rely on the individually operated sewing machine. This means that labour cost continues to be an expense that the industry has sought to minimize through employment of a docile labour force which can be controlled, and through outsourcing to areas where wages are low. For this reason, economic historian Nancy Green has argued that the garment workers' struggle for better conditions – although it has been celebrated as a series of union victories – has been lost in the long run. After the large textile and garment factories that existed in many countries in West Europe from the 1950s to the 1980s have been dismantled, most garment manufacturing has been outsourced to East Europe or Asia, and it is the search for low-cost production facilities that has been the driver of the globalization of the apparel industry. Working conditions in factories in, for example, Bangladesh and China today are directly comparable to those in London or Paris a century ago.

The term that is most commonly used to invoke poor working conditions is sweatshop. Even though there is no agreed definition of sweatshop the term connotes production facilities that lack basic conditions for safety and comfort, such as air ventilation, space between working stations, storage space and accessible exits. Fire exits may be blocked by bundles of finished products, waiting to be shipped. However, it would be wrong to assume that all developing country factories are sweatshops. In fact because the apparel industry is a vibrant sector there are actually many well-equipped factories that supply European brands. In such cases, exploitation may be less visible, for example regarding child labour, union assembly rights, and various forms of harassment.

Also, in China garment workers are recruited among young women from rural areas who obtain a visa for a particular industrial zone. As migrant workers, their mobility is limited and the price they have paid to enter the labour market is so big that they are likely to put up with missing wages and harassment rather than return home empty-handed. Scholars disagree on how to assess wage levels in the workers' own terms. Compared to village life their income represents a major opportunity, and many women do return to start a small pig farm or similar enterprise for their earnings. However, in the factories they also become familiar with much higher wage differentials, both in relation to factory owners, and in relation to the end consumers.

Environment

Concern for how natural resources are being managed has spread since the 1960s. The concept of sustainability was first presented in 1983 in the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission, after its chair, Norwegian stateswoman Gro Harlem Brundtland. Here sustainable development is defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Since then the interest in sustainability has grown, especially since the human-induced climate changes began to be widely experienced in the first decade of the 21st century. But in the same period, the industries and agro-businesses that use up environmental resources have also grown.

The single biggest environmental problem of the fashion business is cotton farming. This is not in itself surprising since cotton is the most important textile material. According to WWF, cotton makes up 48 per cent of all textile production, while 45% is taken up by synthetics, with the rest accounted for by other fibres. About 20 million tones of cotton are produced each year in around 90 countries. China, United States, India, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and West Africa account for over 75% of global production. The negative impact on the environment come from the pesticides and water usage in cotton farming. It can take more than 20,000 litres of water to produce 1kg of cotton; equivalent to a single T-shirt and pair of jeans. 73% of global cotton harvest comes from irrigated land. The amount of pesticides used is approximately equivalent to the weight of the fibre produced. Although demand for organic cotton is growing, by 2007 less than 1 per cent of the global cotton production was organic. In the further processing of cotton, polluting chemicals are used for washing, bleaching and dying.

Although wool constitutes a much smaller proportion of all textile production, it is also responsible for pollution, through pesticides used on sheep to fight sheep lice and blowflies, and on wool processing, including scouring which is the process that removes wool grease (lanolin), shrink proofing and dyeing. Some small wool companies have specialised in gentler processing so that they can offer low residue wool, as opposed to the standard high residue wool.

Synthetic fibres such as Polyester, Nylon, Acrylic and Polypropylene have also been singled out for their negative environmental impact, primarily because they are derived from mineral oil, a non-renewable resource and secondly because processed in an energy and technology-intensive manner. The development of synthetic fibres has had an enormous impact on clothing production and consumption in Europe since the 1960s, especially for promoting a seemingly limitless consumer appetite for fashion and clothing. Synthetic fibres are non-bio-degradable and as such they make up a special waste problem. Since the 1990s it has been possible to recycle polyester fibres so that, for example, plastic bottles can be made into fleece sweaters. Canadian

outdoor wear brand Patagonia has worked with the Japanese chemical company Teijin to establish a recycling programme for a wide range of synthetic fibre garments. Petro-chemical companies in Europe are also involved in developing green technologies to be used in clothing.

In addition to clothing production, use should also be included into considerations of environmental impact. In particular, the washing machine uses up water, detergent and electricity. It is documented that clothing in a country such as Norway is more worn by going through frequent washing cycles than by being worn on the body, and clothing is often discarded because the colour or material has been negatively affected through washing.

Animal rights

The concern with cruelty against animals in the fur trade goes back to the late 19th century when it developed in alliance with the anti-vivisectionist movement, which criticized the use animals for medical experimentation. The development of the theoretical argument of animal rights, by philosophers such as Peter Singer and Tom Regan, took place in the 1970s. Animal rights is the idea that the basic interests of non-human animals — for example, the interest in avoiding suffering — should be afforded the same consideration as the basic interests of human beings. Animal rights advocates argue that animals should no longer be regarded as property, or treated as resources for human purposes, but should instead be regarded as legal persons and members of the moral community. Although animal rights groups are opposed to all the ways in which humans use animals for their own purpose, they have been particularly successful in campaigns against fur and cosmetics. There is a strong utilitarian influence on the discourse of animal rights, which tends to condemn what it sees as luxury and human vanity.

In the 1980s, anti fur campaigns were extremely effective in casting doubt about the moral legitimacy of wearing animal skins and caused a major downturn in the demand for fur, especially in Germany, Great Britain and Holland. The anti-fur campaigns are considered to be radical in that they were primarily aimed at fur consumers, who were harassed while their coats were spray painted or slashed with razors. Fur farming was also targeted and the anti-fur campaigns have ensured that animal welfare has become a central concern, but from the mid-1990s to the end of the first decade of the 21st century the popularity of fur among European consumers has been on the rise.

In the 1980s animal rights campaigns also turned against animal testing in the cosmetics and toiletries industry, which eventually led to substantial changes in the cosmetics industry and to greatly increased efforts toward the development of non-animal alternatives. At that time, the countries in Europe requires that products are tested extensively for safety purposes. Two tests were particularly controversial. The Draize eye irritancy test uses rabbits to estimate the ability of a test substance to irritate or damage the eye. This

involves putting the test substance into one of the rabbit's eyes and then scoring changes in various parts of the eye as compared to the untreated eye over a 7-day period. Many companies no longer use the Draize test at all, though non-animal methods have not yet replaced it altogether. Where it is still used, the number of rabbits has been reduced dramatically, and the techniques have been refined considerably, using much lower dosages of the test chemicals and providing an anesthetic to ease the pain. The other acute-toxicity test that has gotten a lot of publicity is called the LD50 test ('lethal dose 50 percent'). This test estimates the dosage of a substance needed to kill 50% of a group of rats or other test animals. In this test, groups of animals are given doses of particular chemical agent, such as a household product, to find out the amount needed to kill half of the animal subjects. The classic LD50 test has been banned in parts of Europe. Alternative methods still involve animals, but the numbers have been reduced and the techniques refined.

It is estimated that animal testing of cosmetics has been reduced by 80-90 per cent. It is now possible to buy products that are labeled as "cruelty-free" or "not tested on animals." These labels do not always mean the same thing, but they typically used on products that are made from ingredients that are known to be safe. By the first decade of the 21st century, cosmetics testing has been banned in the Netherlands, Belgium, and the UK, but France, which is home to the world's largest cosmetics company, L'Oreal, is opposed to extending the ban to the European Union as a whole. The ban is also opposed by the European Federation for Cosmetics Ingredients, which represents 70 companies in Switzerland, Belgium, France, Germany and Italy.

Favorite clothes as an ethically sound choice

One of the few scholars who has moved beyond the single issue approach is Norwegian consumer researcher Ingun Grimstad Klepp, who has conducted extensive research on women's clothing practices and sense of comfort in relation to environmental impact. She argues that 'favourite clothes' are all-round ethically sound, favourite clothes are defined as clothes in which the owner feels comfortable (good fit is more important than the latest trend), and which the owner will want to wear (and self-esteem is one issue). Favourite clothes are typically from a relatively expensive price range, not because expensive clothes are necessarily of a higher quality than cheap clothes, but because more care is taken to ensure that the wearer really wants this particular item. By contrast, low-priced items, which involve pressure to minimize out-of-factory prices and hence exploitation of workers and resources, are easier to buy, and hence increase the risk of a 'mistake' that the owner will never wear. Because the owner takes good care of favourite clothes, wash them carefully, repair them when needed, and wear them frequently, they tend to last longer, and thus minimize the waste and negative impact on the environment.

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